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ABSTRACT

This study examined the complexities of adjustment to college and its effect on the college student's intent-to-persist in college. The study mailed survey questionnaires (a combination of the "Anticipated Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire" and the "Social Propensity Scale") to a random sample of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen who completed the fall semester and re-enrolled for the spring semester as well as to the entire population of first-time, full-time degree-seeking freshmen who dropped out during the fall semester or did not re-enroll for spring. The study also examined test scores and first-semester grade-point-averages. Of the 1,500 students, 338 returned usable questionnaires. Results found that students who considered dropping out had significantly lower adjustment scores in all areas and lower intent-to-persist scores. A path analysis model also verified the importance of adjustment on students' intent-to-persist. Overall, the study concluded that first-time freshmen face challenges in both changing environments and in moving from adolescence to adulthood and that the impact of personal and academic adjustment difficulties ultimately cause significant numbers of students to drop out. (Contains 19 references.) (JB)

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Investigating First-Semester Freshman Adjustment to College Using a Measurement of Student Psychosocial Adjustment

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This paper was presented at the Thirty-Fourth Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research held at The New Orleans Marriott, New Orleans, Louisiana, May 29, 1994 - June 1, 1994. This paper was reviewed by the AIR Forum Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC Collection of Forum Papers.

Jean Endo
Editor
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Investigating First-Semester Freshman Adjustment to College Using a Measurement of Student Psychosocial Adjustment

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses upon adjustment to college and the effect on the student's intent-to- persist. A random sample of first-time freshmen completed a modified version of the Anticipated Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire to measure academic, social, and personal adjustment, institutional commitment, and satisfaction. All adjustment scores, intent-to-persist score, and student satisfaction were significantly lower for students who considered dropping out during the first semester. To better understand the relationship between pre-college variables, college experience variables and the intent-to-persist score, a path analysis model was created. The intended audience for this presentation are persons interested in student retention, assessment, and the freshman year experience.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Each fall an estimated 2.2 million new freshmen enter higher education institutions in this country (NCES, 1992). Approximately twenty percent of first-time freshmen who enter four-year institutions each fall do not return to their respective institutions the second year. Typically, institutions lose the greatest number of students during the freshman year, especially during or directly after the first semester (Porter, 1989). These findings are confirmed by Upcraft and Gardner (1989), who determined that the students' most critical adjustment period occurs during the first two to six weeks of their first semester.For many of these students, the adjustment into college life is marked with problems related to self-identity, isolation, and anxiety. Students move from an environment where they might have been adjusted socially to one where their identity must be reestablished and reinterpreted. This new environment causes some students to experience anonymity for the first time (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969). Boyer (1987) stated that experiencing anonymity is common among first-time students, especially among those who arrive at college with unrealistic expectations regarding their first semester. These expectations can lead to maladjustment within the new environment and ultimately can contribute to students prematurely leaving an institution.

Few studies in educational journals have focused on the effect of student adjustment on retention. However, studies have begun to appear in psychology journals on various components on the college student adjustment process. For example, Hoffman and Weiss found that problems related to the separation from parents is a contributing factor of psychological problems often seen in student counseling centers (Lapsley, Rice & Shadid, 1989). The process of students moving from dependence on parents to becoming functioning, independent individuals has been found to be a major instigator of, or prohibitor to, student adjustment. In addition, Rice, Cole, and Lapsley (1990) found individual independence and separation from parents to be good indicators of a successful adjustment to college. Additional psychological problems resulting from adjustment difficulties include personality disorders, eating disorders, and suicidal ideation (Rice, 1992).

A successful transition can lead to a feeling of success and well-being, in contra , an

unsuccessful attempt can lead to stress and failure. Bronfenbrenner (1979) found that the greater the difference between the previous environment and the new environment at college, the greater the stress level and more difficult the transition. However, when the two environments are too similar, even though it may contribute to greater student retention, it retards the chance of additional growth and development which occurs when a student successfully adapts to a different environment. Feldman and Newcomb (1969) concurred, when the high school and college environments are practically identical, little growth can be expected except that which is associated with maturation. Growth attributed to maturation would be experienced by non-college attenders as well as college attenders. When students are not faced with diversity, differing ideas, and confronting attitudes, they are not challenged and change does not occur.

First-year college students are faced with the movement from adolescence to adulthood, separating themselves from high school friends and family, and adjusting to the new social and academic environments at college. These concerns are coupled with additional psychological concerns of academic and social adjustment, development of autonomy, and identity development. Tinto (1987) wrote that in order for a student to persist, a student must successfully make the adjustment to college and become integrated within either the social or the academic environments within the institution. Failure to successfully complete any of the above may lead to lack of integration in the new college environment, and may be a contributing factor in students prematurely leaving an institution. Adjustment-to-college difficulties are not limited to boundaries of gender, race or academic preparedness and the ability to identify these students will lead to a earlier and hopefully more successful intervention.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the complexities of adjustment-to-college and its effect on students' intent-to-persist in college.

Research Questions

The following research questions were pursued in this study:

1. What specific experiences during the adjustment period influenced a students' intent-to-persist?
2. To what extent was the adjustment to college process related to the students' intent to persist?
3. What other intervening variables are associated with student adjustment and intent-to-persist?

Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

This study utilizes the combined theoretical frameworks of Van Gennep (1960), Tinto (1989) and Chickering (1969). Van Gennep, a Dutch anthropologist, studied the rites of movement and membership in society and developed a theory of adjustment, characterized by three distinct phases: separation, transition and incorporation. Separation occurs when a person moves from an old environment to one that is new and unfamiliar. Transition occurs as a person attempts to adapt to the new environment and learn the norms of the new group. Incorporation is the official initiation into the new society where the person is now a full-fledged member. He theorizes that these phases are cyclical and could be applied to many different situations throughout a person's lifetime. Tinto (1989) adapted Van Gennep's three phases to study the process of student adjustment. Separation occurs when the student moves away from the home and familiar environment to the new university community. Transition occurs as the student attempts to adjust academically and socially to the new community. Upon completion of transition, the final stage of incorporation occurs when a student possesses a sense of belonging and membership in the new college community.

Limitations of the Study

Because this study was conducted at only one institution, the results of the study are not applicable to all types of higher education institutions. Another limitation is students were not surveyed until the second semester and some students may not have had a clear recollection of their first semester. It appeared however, that most students were able to give a complete description of their first semester and were able to put their experiences in perspective.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this causal/comparative study were collected in a questionnaire format. In this study, the adjustment-to-college score is the independent variable and the student's intent-to-persist score is the dependent variable. Secondary independent variables are student satisfaction, ACT/SAT score, and first-semester grade-point-average.

A random sample was chosen from the first-time, full-time degree-seeking freshman cohort group at a research institution in the Midwest who completed the fall semester and re-enrolled for the spring semester (n=2,319). The entire population of first-time, full-time degree-seeking freshmen who dropped out during the fall semester, and stop-outs who completed the fall semester but did not re-enroll for the spring semester (n=181) were sent questionnaires. A total of 1,500 students were sent questionnaires by mail for completion.

An inventory was constructed by merging and adapting two existing widely used inventories: The Anticipated Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (ASACQ) (Baker & Schultz, 1992) and the Social Propensity Scale (SPS) (Baker & Siryk, 1983). Robert Baker, a creator of the inventories gave permission for these inventories to be adapted to fit the needs of this study. The primary change was to rephrase the statements from future to past tense.

The ASACQ was chosen because it was found to be a very good measure of components of the adjustment-to-college period. The instrument is comprised of 67 statements in which students ranked their experiences on a ten-point scale. The inventory consisted of four sub-sets: social adjustment, academic adjustment, personal adjustment and institutional and goal commitment. Sub-set scores were calculated by totaling the scores on individual statements and dividing my the number of statements in the sub-set to establish an average score. An average was calculated because not all sub-sets were comprised of the same number of statements. A composite overall score was calculated by averaging the sub-set scores. Theoretically, well adjusted students have a higher overall score than poorly-

adjusted students.

The dependent variable in this study, the 'intent-to-persist' score was the average score obtained from eight statements from the instrument which best measured this construct. The eight statements were:

1. I expect to stay at this university for a bachelor's degree.
2. I gave a lot of thought to transferring to another university.
3. I gave a lot of thought about dropping out of college all together.
4. I thought about taking time off from college and finishing later.
5. I wished I would have attended another university.
6. I was pleased about my decision to go to college.
7. I was pleased about my decision to attend this university in particular.
8. Getting a college degree was very important to me.

According to the literature, the "intent-to-leave" an institution is the best predictor of retention (Bean, 1982). Merton's (1968) concept of self-fulfilling prophecy is an underlying factor. If a student is convinced that they will drop out from the institution or from higher education, the lack of institutional and goal commitment will increase the risk of attrition. According to Bean (1982), "attitudinal variables are expected to be the best predictors of intent to leave, although environmental variables such as opportunity to transfer and organizational variables such as grades might also have direct effects on intent-to-leave" (p. 29).

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Sample

Of the 1,500 freshmen who were sampled, 341 returned the questionnaires (16% of the population) for a response rate of 23%. Of those returned, 338 of the responses were used in this study; One response was incomplete, and two were received after the data was finalized. The gender and ethnic breakdown of the sample differed in proportion from that of the freshman population. The sample contains a larger proportion of females, whites and international students than the population. Even though males make up a larger portion of the population (52%) than females (48%), females returned the questionnaires at a much higher rate, accounting for 63% of the sample. Whites, make up

75% of the population and 81.1% of the sample; international students make up 1.4% of the population and 4.4% of the sample. The other ethnic groups make up a smaller portion of the sample than their proportion within the freshman population. In particular, blacks make up 7.7% of the population, but only 2.7% of the sample. The respondents also appear to have a slightly higher average ACT score, and a higher average high school and first-semester grade-point-average than their peers within the population.

Research Question 1: What specific experiences during the adjustment process had an impact upon the students intent-to-persist?

Students cited problems relating to personal adjustment during their first weeks of college (table 1). Of the responses, 47.1% were categorized into personal adjustment, 28.5 % in academic adjustment, 12.8% in institutional and goal commitment, and 11.8% in social adjustment. Problems stated most frequently related to the difficult transition from high school to college academics (15.6%), homesickness and missing friends/family (15%), difficulty in making friends and socializing (11.8%), stress (10.9%), dorm and roommate problems (7.5%) and feeling lost on campus (7.8%).

TABLE 1. Negative Experiences Cited During the First Weeks of College.

Category	Experience	Percentage	N
Academic Adjustment – 28.6%	Difficult transition from HS Academics	15.6%	68
	Academics (in general)	5.0%	22
	Classes too big	4.4%	19
	Disliked a Professor	1.9%	8
	No Motivation to Study/Skipped Classes	1.6%	7
Social Adjustment – 11.8%	Hard to Make Friends/Difficulty Socializing	11.8%	51
Personal Adjustment – 47.0%	Homesickness/Missed Friends and Family	15.0%	65
	Stressed/Scared	10.9%	47
	Dorm/Roommate/RA Problems	7.5%	33
	Lonely	5.0%	22
	Family Adjustments	1.9%	8
	Bored	1.9%	8
	Difficulty becoming responsible for oneself	1.9%	8
	Depression	1.2%	5
	Isolated (Needle in a Haystack)	0.9%	4
	Became Ill	0.9%	4
Inst/Goal Commitment – 12.7%	Felt Lost/Couldn't find classes and buildings	7.8%	34
	Too Fast Paced	3.1%	13
	Students/Staff rude	1.9%	8
		100.0%	434

Similar responses were also cited as contributors to withdrawal consideration (table 2). The responses were also categorized into the four adjustment subgroups, with 44.5% placed in personal adjustment problems. The other 55% were placed in academic adjustment (28.3%), institutional commitment (18.2%) and social adjustment (9.1%). Of the 338 respondents, 72 (21.3 %) considered dropping out during the first semester. The reasons most often stated for consideration of withdrawal were: 1) Difficult transition from high school academics to college academics (28.3%), 2) Personal problems related to stress, depression, frustration and emotional problems (22.3%), 3) Disliked the university or environment within the university (15.2%) and 4) Homesickness (15.2%). Financial problems which has been traditionally frequently stated in exit interviews as the reason for withdrawal (Cope, 1978) only claimed 3% of the responses.

TABLE 2. Reasons Given for Withdrawal Consideration

Category	Reason	Percentage	N
Academic Adjustment – 28.3%	Poor Grades/Difficult Transition from High School Academics	28.3%	28
Personal Adjustment – 44.5%	Homesickness/Missed Friends and Family	15.2%	15
	Dorms/Roommate	4.0%	4
	Personal Problems: Stress, Depression, and Emotional Problems	22.3%	22
	Finances	3.0%	3
Social Adjustment – 9.1%	Didn't fit in/Difficulty making friends	9.1%	9
Instit/Goal Commitment – 18.2%	Disliked University/Environment	15.2%	15
	Life Change (Marriage,Military, etc.)	3.0%	3
		100.0%	99

Difficult transition from high school to college academics:

The most cited reasons for adjustment difficulties and withdrawal considerations were related to academic adjustment from high school to college academics. These difficulties related both to academic preparedness, study skills, and reading skills. Additional adjustments included a larger

number of students per class, differences in course scheduling, large reading and writing assignments, and increased discipline required to complete college-level academic work. It appeared that students from smaller high schools tended to have more difficulty with the transition. One such student said that "I had to adjust to the huge classes. . . coming from a small high school, it was difficult for me to learn in a huge classroom." Another stated that "Academically I struggled because I wasn't used to the large lecture classes and the amount of studying it took to keep up. . . I became extremely frustrated and my goals which had one been very high were quickly lowered because I felt I couldn't achieve the higher ones." Students who were not challenged in high school or did not find it necessary to study cited difficulties related to poor study habits and reading skills.

Disliked the university or environment within the university:

Of all the reasons for withdrawal, disliking the university or the environment seemed to be the strongest common denominator of the students who had actually withdrawn from the university. It is not clear if the reasons stated for withdrawal were the actual reasons or if the former students were using the questionnaire as an opportunity to sound their complaints. The majority of the reasons tended to surround the social environment on campus: "the campus was too Greek oriented, I wasn't Greek so I didn't fit in", "people were pretty cold in general", "the majority of people were stuck on themselves" and "the university is too Greek oriented, I was looked down upon because I didn't join a fraternity. . . is a very egotistical school and I didn't like it." A current student wrote "I hate it here, everyone I met were snobs and made me feel like nothing for not being Greek, as a matter of fact, I am transferring next semester to another school."

Homesickness:

The move to college is often the first time many students have been away from family for an extended period of time. Especially during the first weeks of college, many freshmen experience homesickness, and some students are so overwhelmed that they leave the institution. Of all the

personal adjustments, homesickness was by far the most commonly stated adjustment problem. One student wrote a paragraph that was very representative of the responses:

> The first few weeks "were the scariest time of my life. . .having to leave home where I had many wonderful friends and great parents that were around all the time, and move into a place that was very foreign to me. . . trying to move in and handling college academics all in two weeks almost made me decide to want to quit that first or second week. . .I was often lonely and would sit in my room by myself for hours on end."

Another student wrote "The first three weeks were very turbulent. . .one minute I would be so excited about the new found independence, and the next minute I'd be crying because my family and friends were so far away." Homesickness coupled with the lack of social adjustment were frequently stated in the responses as instigators of transitional difficulties. The students would be homesick and at the same time, not have friends or be involved in activities to help ease the transition.

A t-test was performed to determine if there was a difference in the intent-to-persist scores between those responding positive and negative on statements chosen from the questionnaire that measured the reasons stated for adjustment difficulties and consideration of withdrawal (table 3).

TABLE 3. Results of T-Test for Specific Questionnaire Statements With Intent-to-Persist Score.

QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENT	Response	N	Intent-to-Persist Mean	T	PROB
I felt I fit in well on campus.	yes	282	8.417	-9.6711	0.0001
	no	56	6.036		
I found academic work difficult.	yes	132	8.060	0.3236	0.7465
	no	206	8.000		
I was not smart enough for the academic work I was expected to do.	yes	37	6.979	-3.5997	0.0004
	no	301	8.150		
Homesickness was a source of difficulty for me.	yes	72	7.250	-3.9732	0.0001
	no	266	8.232		
I enjoyed living in university or Greek housing.	yes	202	8.408	-4.7023	0.0001
	no	74	7.265		
I got along well with my roommate.	yes	221	8.245	-2.6663	0.0081
	no	61	7.547		
I worried a lot about my college expenses.	yes	167	8.369	-3.3704	0.0008
	no	171	7.683		
I felt lonely a lot.	yes	118	6.726	-10.599	0.0001
	no	220	8.718		
I experienced difficulty in coping with stresses imposed upon me.	yes	89	6.992	-6.2963	0.0001
	no	249	8.391		
I made friends quickly and easily.	yes	261	8.329	-5.6994	0.0001
	no	77	6.985		

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Responses of 1 to 5 on the following statements were rescored as negative, and 6 to 10 as positive: 1)Homesickness was a source of difficulty for me, 2) I had difficulty coping with the stresses imposed upon me, 3) I was not really smart enough for the academic work I was expected to do, 4) I worried a lot about my college expenses, 5) I felt that I fit in on campus, 6) I got along well with my roommate, 7) I enjoyed living in university or greek housing, 8) I made friends quickly and easily, 9) I found academic work difficult and 10) I felt lonely a lot.

The only statement in which a significant difference on the intent-to-persist score did not occur was "I found academic work difficult." The most dramatic difference was calculated for the response "I felt I fit in well on campus." Freshmen with a negative response had a lower intent-to-persist score by 2.4 points than those with a positive response. A related statement,"I felt lonely a lot" was answered positive by almost one-third of the sample. This same group scored two points lower on the intent-to-persist score than those who answered this question with a negative response. Freshmen stating that "Homesickness was a source of difficulty for me" also scored a point lower on the intent score as compared to those who answered negatively.

Within this sample, it does not appear that worries regarding college expenses affected intent-to-persist to any great extent. There was only a slight but significant difference in scores obtained by those worried about college expenses as opposed to those who are not. The sample was divided almost in half by negative and positive responses to this statement. Those who did not worry about college expenses scored 0.7 of a point higher than those concerned about their expenses.

Research Question 2: To what extent was the adjustment-to-college process related to the student's intent-to-persist score?

A t-test was used to determine whether the difference in scores obtained by students who considered dropping out were significantly different (<0.05) than those who did not consider dropping out (Table 4). There was a significant difference in all four sub-set scores, the overall adjustment score, the intent-to-persist score and the student satisfaction level. The greatest differences

TABLE 4. Results of T-Test for Drop Consideration with Selective Variables.

	DROP CONSID.	N	MEAN	T	PROB
Social Adjustment	yes	72	5.457	5.3485	0.0001
	no	266	6.659		
Academic Adjustment	yes	72	5.464	5.4239	0.0001
	no	266	6.480		
Inst/Goal Commitment	yes	72	6.009	11.2535	0.0001
	no	266	8.168		
Personal Adjustment	yes	72	5.430	8.6791	0.0001
	no	266	7.120		
Intent-to-Persist	yes	72	5.861	11.3776	0.0001
	no	266	8.608		
Student Satisfaction	yes	70	5.286	6.4954	0.0001
	no	264	7.295		
Overall Adjustment	yes	72	5.590	10.2558	0.0001
	no	266	7.106		

occurred in the students intent-to-persist scores (2.75 points), institutional/goal commitment (2.16 points), student satisfaction (2.0 points) and personal adjustment (1.69 points). When dividing the sample by male and female, only the scores obtained in personal adjustment were significantly different, with males scoring a mean of 7.01 points as compared with females scoring 6.6 points.

Correlational analysis determined several variables were also related to student intent-to-persist (table 5). At the 0.05 level it was found that intent-to-persist was highly correlated with the overall adjustment score at 0.78 and with student satisfaction at 0.56. Other slight positive but significant correlations also occurred with high school grade-point-average (0.12), college grade-point-average (0.22), the number of weeks to academic adjustment (0.28) and the number of weeks to social adjustment (0.28).

Components of the intent-to-persist score were also analyzed. The score consisted of the mean score of eight statements from the adjustment-to-college instrument. Responses from each of the statements were grouped into either a positive or negative category. Scores in the range of 1-5 were reclassified as negative, and scores in the range of 6-10 were reclassified as positive. A t-test using each of the eight statements with the variables: overall adjustment score, academic adjustment, social

adjustment, personal adjustment, institutional commitment, intent-to-persist score, ACT, first-semester grade-point-average and satisfaction score was performed (table 6).

TABLE 5. Correlational Analysis Between Variables

	High School GPA	Weeks to Social Adj.	Weeks to Acad Adj.	College GPA	ACT Score	Student Satis.	Overall Adjust.	Intent to Persist
Intent-to-Persist	0.12 *	0.28 **	0.28 **	0.22 **	0.09	0.56 **	0.78 **	1.0
Overall Adjustment	0.06	0.26 **	0.34 **	0.39 **	0.16 *	0.62 **	1.0	
Student Satisfaction	0.53	0.27 **	0.29 **	0.32 **	0.09	1.0		
ACT Score	0.44 **	−0.09	0.08	0.43 **	1.0			
College GPA	0.39 **	−0.06	0.19 **	1.0				
Weeks to Academic Adj.	0.09	−0.15 **	1.0					
Weeks to Social Adj.	0.06	1.0						
High School GPA	1.0							

Notes: *p<.05. **p<.01

TABLE 6. Results of T-Test for Components of Intent-to-Persist Score
T-Scores for Each Variable.

QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENT	Overall Adjust.	Academic Adjust.	Social Adjust.	Personal Adjust.	Inst. Commit.	Intent to Persist	ACT	First Sem. G.P.A.	Student Satis.
I was pleased about my decision to go to college	−6.66**	−4.40*	−4.80**	−4.81**	−9.92**	−10.16**	−0.79	−1.54	−3.41*
I was pleased about my decision to attend this university in particular.	−8.06**	−2.95**	−8.01**	−6.79**	−13.00**	−16.96**	0.75	−1.00	−8.82**
Getting a college degree is important to me.	−4.24**	−3.24**	−3.25**	−2.11*	−7.40*	−7.47**	1.10	−99.08	−2.43*
I wished I would have attended another university.	−7.45**	−3.13**	−8.10**	−5.34**	−11.95**	−15.72**	0.03	−0.70	−8.67**
I expect to stay at this university for a bachelor's degree	−5.51**	−3.59**	−3.80**	−4.25**	−10.34**	−12.25**	−3.25**	−3.59**	−5.45**
I gave a lot of thought to transferring to another university.	−10.19**	−6.06**	−7.57**	−8.41**	−15.47**	−19.25**	−2.18*	−2.21*	−9.70**
I gave a lot of thought to dropping out of college altogether.	−9.58**	−5.88**	−6.16**	−8.34**	−14.17**	−15.31**	−2.18*	−3.12**	−6.14**
I thought about taking time off from college and finishing later.	−10.69**	−7.36**	−5.92**	−9.66**	−14.60**	−15.42**	−2.60**	−4.83**	−7.24**

Notes: *p<.05. **p<.01.

Statement 1: "I was pleased about my decision to go to college"

As expected, most (95.9%) of the random sample agreed with this statement. However, there was a significant difference on several variables between those who agreed and the few who disagreed with this statement. The variables were: the intent-to-persist score (4.62 points), institutional commitment (3.78 points), social adjustment (2.02 points) satisfaction score (1.96 points), personal adjustment (1.94 points), and overall adjustment score (1.81 points). Academic preparedness did not appear to be an issue, both ACT and high school grade point average were virtually the same between the two groups. Even though those who agreed with the statement had a higher first-semester grade-point-average by 0.32 than those who disagreed, the difference was not statistically significant.

Statement 2: "I was pleased about my decision to attend this university in particular"

After specifying this university in particular, positive responses dropped from 96% to 84% signifying that students were pleased to be attending college but not necessarily at this institution. Significant differences also occurred between the intent-to-persist scores (3.49 points), satisfaction score (2.52 points), institutional commitment (2.48 points), social adjustment (1.72 points), personal adjustment (1.43 points), overall adjustment (1.15 points) and academic adjustment (0.60 of a point).

Statement 3: "Getting a college degree was very important to me"

The response was similar to the statement one, 96.3% of the sample gave a positive response to this question. The differences between the scores on most of the variables were also significant: intent-to-persist (3.87 points), institutional commitment (3.21 points), satisfaction (1.51 points), social adjustment (1.50 points), academic adjustment (1.31 points), overall adjustment (1.29 points) and personal adjustment (0.94 of a point). Academic background and performance were not an issue on this statement.

Statement 4.: "I wish I would have attended another university"

Almost 25% of the sample agreed with this statement. The differences in the areas of intent-to-persist (2.94 points), institutional commitment (2.0 points) and satisfaction (2.20 points) signifies decreased feelings of commitment to the university and indicates a probable high-risk group of freshmen. To a lesser degree, the adjustment scores were also significant: social adjustment (1.53 points), overall adjustment (1.05 points), personal adjustment (1.02 points) and academic adjustment (0.56 of a point). The non-significant difference in ACT and first-semester grade-point-average and the only slight score difference in academic adjustment, academic background and performance were not an issue in this statement.

Statement 5: "I expect to stay at this university for a bachelor' s degree"

Upon analysis it was found that 14% of the sample did not expect to graduate from this university. It does appear, however, that responses to this statement may be academically driven. There was a significant difference in ACT scores and first-semester grade-point averages between the two groups. Those students who did not expect to graduate from this university had an average ACT score of 22.9 in contrast to 25.1 for students who expected to complete their degree at this institution. The first-semester grade-point-average for the same groups were 2.69 and 3.11 respectively. Other significant differences occurred in the intent score (3.07 points), institutional commitment (2.27 points), student satisfaction (1.77 points), personal adjustment (1.0 point), social adjustment (0.94 of a point), overall adjustment (0.89 of a point), and academic adjustment (0.78 of a point).

Statement 6: "I gave a lot of thought to transferring to another university"

Almost 30% of the sample agreed with this statement signifying some possible discontent within the freshman class, and like statement five may also be academically driven. Large differences occurred in the categories of intent-to-persist (3.02 points), institutional commitment (2.25 points) and student satisfaction (2.20 points). The two groups were also divided academically. Students who

considered transferring had an average first-semester grade-point-average of 2.91 in contrast to 3.11 for those not considering transferring. The average ACT scores for the two groups were also found to be significantly different at 24 and 25.2 respectively. The differences in adjustment scores were also significant: personal (1.40 points), social (1.33 points), overall (1.13 points) and academic (0.96 of a point).

Statement 7: "I gave a lot of thought to dropping out of college altogether"

Where 30% of the sample considered to transferring to another institution, 12% gave thought to dropping out all together, signifying commitment to completing a college education, but not necessarily at this institution. The differences between those giving thought to dropping out altogether was even greater than those considering transferring. There were dramatic differences especially in the categories of intent-to-persist (3.90 points) institutional commitment scores (3.10 points) and first-semester grade-point-average (2.69 for those considering dropping out and 3.10 for those not considering). This group also were less adjusted in all areas than the transfer group: personal (2.02 points), social (1.62 points), overall (1.57 points) and academic (1.45 points). There was also a 2.16 point difference in student satisfaction between the two groups.

Statement 8: "I thought about taking time off from college and finishing later"

This question gained more positive responses (15% of the sample) than the question regarding dropping out altogether. The differences widened further from the statement seven, between the first-semester grade-point average: 2.60 and 3.14 and student satisfaction (2.19 points). Differences in student adjustment, however, was very similar to the previous question: personal (1.98 points), overall (1.49 points), academic (1.45 points), and social (1.36 points).

It appears that most students are very committed to attending college in general (96%). However, when this institution is specified, the percentage drops to 84% (statement two), and 77% (statement four), indicating commitment a college education but not necessarily at this institution.

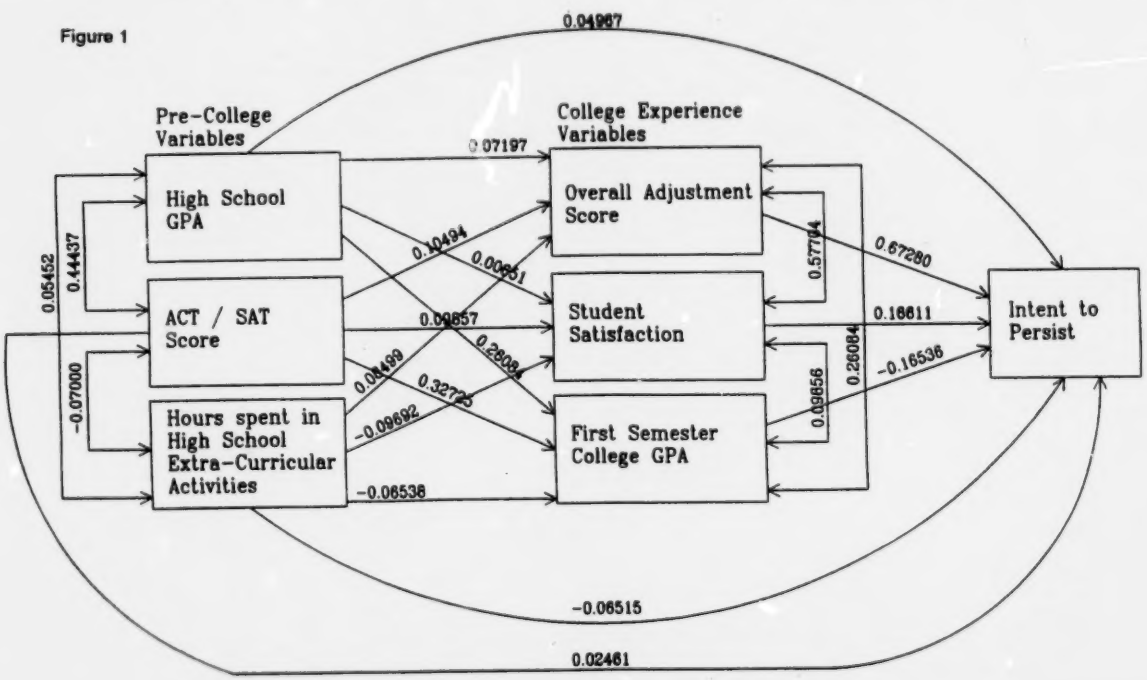
When asked about remaining at this university, 14% did not expect to stay for a bachelor's degree, 30% gave a lot of thought to transferring to another institution, 15% gave thought to stopping out, and 12% gave thought to dropping out of college altogether. It appears that these groups are less adjusted, less committed to the university and have lower first-semester grades.

Research Question 3: What other intervening variables are associated with student adjustment and the intent-to-persist?

A path analysis model (figure 1) was created to help illustrate the relationship between pre-college variables, college experience variables and the dependent variable, the intent-to-persist score. The pre-college variables included are high school grade-point-average, ACT/SAT score, and the hours spent in high school extracurricular activities. To obtain the best college experience variables, PROC RSQUARE was used in the SAS program initially to identify the best variables and stepwise regression verified the choice.

Using single variables, the most direct path through the model was ACT/SAT to the overall adjustment score to the intent-to-persist score. When controlling for high school grade-point-average

Figure 1



and hours spent in high school extracurricular activities, the relationship between ACT/SAT and the overall adjustment score was 0.105. The overall adjustment score, when controlling for student satisfaction score and first-semester grade-point-average, had a .673 relationship with the intent-to-persist score. As was expected, the ACT/SAT score had a 0.327 relationship with first-semester grade-point average, when controlling for the other pre-college variables, a slightly negative relationship occurs between the grade-point-average and intent-to-persist score. It appears that pre-college variables have some impact upon the intent-to-persist, however the student's adjustment process has the greatest impact. The overall score contains not only the academic and social integration issues, but personal adjustment and institutional commitment as well. It appears that this model illustrates that student satisfaction and first-semester grade-point-average are important, but the deciding factors include: integrating into the college environment, developing a sense of loyalty to the institution, developing clear career objectives, personal and psychological adjustment into college, and social and academic integration, which are all measured by the overall adjustment score.

When combining college-experience variables, a combination of overall adjustment and college grade-point average, and the combination of overall with student satisfaction, both had a relationship of 0.616 with intent-to-persist. This relationship is lower than the 0.673 relationship of overall adjustment, as a single variable with intent-to-persist. A decreased relationship also occurred when pooling pre-college variables together indicating that the overall adjustment score has the strongest relationship with intent-to-persist.

CONCLUSIONS

First-time freshmen face two major obstacles when entering college, not only are they moving from adolescence to adulthood, but changing environments as well. From the responses on the questionnaire regarding difficulties during the first few weeks and reasons for withdrawal consideration, these obstacles cause difficulties during the adjustment period. Adjustment difficulties, in particular those relating to personal and academic adjustments had major impacts upon the new

freshmen, ultimately causing some students to drop out. Students who considered dropping out had significantly lower adjustment scores in all areas and a lower intent-to-persist score. The path analysis model also verified the importance of adjustment on students intent-to-persist.

It appears that the adjustment to college process, in particular personal and academic adjustment, should be the focus of student personnel administrators. Early intervention such as study skill workshops, semester-long orientation courses, faculty and upper-classmen counseling and mentoring, and planned weekend activities, would be helpful to freshmen trying to overcome adjustment difficulties. A survey instrument such as the Anticipated Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire would be useful in assessment and counseling centers to identify students prone to adjustment difficulties. Upcraft and Gardner (1989) said that "Freshmen should be the target of inclusion, not exclusion. . . they should be weeded in, not weeded out. . . freshmen can not be left to sink or swim" (p. 5).

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